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Adult Education: Using Motivating Strategies and Techniques

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Abstract: Motivation is a key to success. It helps us understand why we do the things we do, or why we learn and thrive to further develop our abilities to do something. In language learning motivation plays a crucial role, because only the motivated students will succeed. Without motivation our performance is diminished. Learners who are not motivated tend to be distracted, bored, unfocused, and even frustrated. On the other hand, motivated learners are eager to find out more, learn new things, pay attention in class and conduct additional research at home in order to better understand a given topic. That is why many teachers/instructors consider motivation a crucial part of the instructional process. As teachers/instructors, we can certainly contribute to the motivation of our students. We can motivate learners through interesting classes, positive attitude as well as attractive exercises. This paper will look into different types of motivation and their influence on the learners as well as some techniques and strategies teachers/instructors can use to motivate their students.

Keywords: *Adult education, andragogy, motivation*

Introduction

Knowing what motivation is and that there are different types of motivations is not enough. Instructors need to find out more, explore what they can do to further motivate their students and thus help them learn not only the language they teach but also some skills that will help the learners in real life situations. There are some common characteristics as well as strategies and techniques that every instructor can learn in order to make the language learning experience a successful one for both the learner and the instructor.

Types of motivations:

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972) there are two main types of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is the desire to become one with the target-language culture, while instrumental motivation reflects the desire to succeed in a field of study or at workplace. Although these are important distinctions, teachers rather look at motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic, the first one being the cognitive drive that pushes the learner to learn for his/her own sake, whereas the extrinsic motivation is derived from external incentives, for example if a learner completes a language course he/she will get a promotion. Intrinsically motivated learners believe in what they are doing and consider it worthwhile. Extrinsically motivated learners do not learn because they want to. They learn because they expect a reward, praise from their parents or a promotion at workplace. Brown (1987) makes a distinction between global, situational, and task motivation. While the global motivation reflects the overall attitude of the learner toward language learning, situational motivation focuses on the context in which the learner finds him/herself. Task motivation is the most focused on, analyzing how the learner approaches a specific task.

Types of learners:

There is a huge difference between pedagogy (the study of teaching children) and andragogy (the study of teaching adults). While pedagogy has to reflect on the learner's abilities and attention spans at a given age, andragogy focuses on learners who can greatly contribute through collaboration with the instructor as well as each other. Andragogy recognizes the maturity of an adult learner. Given the maturity level of the learners, the classes can be learner centered. Instructors can conduct a survey at the beginning of the given course to find out what the adult learners would like to learn (in this case the learners do not determine the overall course description, but rather the focus of the lessons in a given field of studies). Another benefit of adult learners is that they bring in past experiences, which can for example confirm some of the theoretical parts of the course. At the end of each course, the learners can evaluate the course and make suggestions as to where they would like to see improvements. The instructors can then redesign the course based on these evaluations.

Being a Motivating Language Instructor:

No matter which type of motivation, one is clear; the learners have a reason for taking a language course, and it is up to the instructor to help the student reach their goal. So how do we recognize motivated learners? A motivated learner is someone who is willing to take risks and appreciates challenges. He or she promotes a positive self-image and has specific goals that he/she wants to reach. A motivated learner is ambitious and not discouraged when he/she makes mistakes. But motivated learners are not a recipe for a successful language course, the language instructor needs to be motivated as well. Here are some common characteristics that can be learned for the purpose of becoming a motivating language instructor.

1. Offer expertise (both knowledge and preparation)

Learners deserve to have knowledgeable and prepared instructors. An instructor does not need to have the knowledge of all things, but at the same time, it is wise to review some grammar points or the essay structure prior to teaching them. There are times when the instructor simply does not have the answer to a question the learner raises. There is no need to be ashamed; instead the instructor can use it to his/her advantage. Tell the student that you do not have the answer right at that moment, but that you will look it up and answer it next time you have class. You can then make a whole lesson about it if you feel that the rest of the learners would also benefit from knowing this.

Instructors whose native language is not English should not feel uncomfortable if they do not know how to pronounce something. All they need to do is spend more time preparing for the class. Today, there are many online dictionaries that not only provide the definition, but also the pronunciation of a given word.

An instructor's job is not only to be present in class, but also to prepare for it. Every now and then we all improvise, but it is unfair to the learners if the instructor constantly improvises. Just as the learners are dedicating their time and effort into the course they are taking, the instructors are expected to invest time in preparing the lessons. Adult learners are more likely to notice it if the instructor is unprepared. This will certainly cause them to be less motivated in class.

NOTE: Too many "ums" and "ahs" may cause your adult learners to question your competence.

2. Have empathy

Adult learners are most likely parents and have jobs. The instructors need to keep that in mind. Instead of assigning lots of homework, the instructor can design the class so that most of the work is done there and then. It is important to have rules, but at the same time, when it comes to adult learners, the instructors have to be more flexible with the schedule and the attendance. Afternoon and late evening courses are better than morning classes for those who are employed. Attendance should be taken seriously, but the instructors need to understand that every parent will spend time with a sick child rather than attend a class. The instructors can ask that the learners notify them if they will miss a class, so that the instructor can adjust the lesson or some of the activities (if necessary) to a smaller group of students.

3. Be enthusiastic

If we show that we love what we do, people will notice and approach it with a positive attitude. Instructors need to be enthusiastic about their positions and transfer the positive attitude to their students. Grammar is dry, but with the right approach, the instructor can make it fun and thus more interesting.

4. Be clear

Instructors should use the power of language and organization to make sure that every aspect of their course is clear. A very helpful tool is a syllabus. If it is clearly written, distributed at the very beginning of the course and followed by the instructor there will be less confusion.

Additional Motivating Strategies:

In addition to the motivation that the learner brings to the classroom, teachers can contribute through interesting lessons, as well as positive feedback. How do we make sure that we add to learner's motivation? There are several strategies and techniques that guaranty success and thus motivate students.

1. Friendly atmosphere

Learners need to feel recognized and valued. Learning is much easier if the learners feel safe and comfortable. Sometimes it is not enough to praise correct answers only. Instructors need to pay close attention

to learner's progress and acknowledge it. It is not always the matter of grading. Instructors can simply point out that the progress is noticeable by nodding when the learner raises his/her hand and thus acknowledging the learner. These seemingly small gestures help the learner build confidence and further develop his/her intrinsic motivation, as well as encourage him/her to participate more.

NOTE: Some instructors tend to push their students. This approach may actually help in a given situation, but the downside of it is that the learners do not learn to be responsible, because every time they are in the classroom setting the instructor pushes them to produce language, for example.

2. Sense of accomplishment

Another way to ensure motivation is through tests and competitions. Learners want a reward, and in the classroom the reward comes in form of a grade. So, testing and grading students will certainly be a motivating factor. Though taken individually, tests are used to compare the learners' abilities. Instead of focusing on tests only, instructors can also organize competitions through which the learners will have an opportunity to present their knowledge. If the individual learners do not feel comfortable being on their own in a competition, they can be paired up, or even put into small groups. If the competition is not graded, the instructors can come up with a small reward, such as movie theater tickets or a book for each member of the group that has won the competition. If the student who usually does not win or get a very high grade finds him/herself on the winning team, he/she will be intrinsically motivated to continue the good work, as they will feel the sense of accomplishment.

3. Connecting language to learner's interests and needs outside of class

Each learner has interests outside of class. Instructors can ask the learners to share those and then focus the lessons on these topics. For example, if the learners play a particular sport, the instructor can create a lesson on the history of the given sport. Lots of times, the learners do not have the necessary vocabulary to describe things, so the instructor can ask that each learner prepares a short presentation in which he/she will present their favorite sport (how it's played, what the rules are, naming some teams and competitions, etc.).

4. Creating life situations in the classroom

Adult learners usually take language courses to improve their skills for a specific purpose. A lawyer may have some new clients who speak another language; a businessman may be conducting business with foreigners and feels the need to speak their language. If, at the beginning of the course, the learners share the purpose of their language learning, the instructor can make connections to their needs. For example, one whole class can be dedicated to teaching learners how to make phone calls and leave a message. Adult learners appreciate the pragmatic aspects of a class, especially if they end up using the things they have learned in class in real life situations.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that along with the intrinsic and the extrinsic motivation that the learner brings to a language course, the instructor can also greatly contribute by offering expertise, having empathy, being enthusiastic, and clear. There are also some additional strategies and techniques such as creating a friendly atmosphere, acknowledging the progress a learner has made, basing the lessons on the learners' interests outside of class, and or creating real life situations in the classroom to teach learners how to handle them in a foreign language, that can contribute to the learners' existing motivation to learn. Instructors should be aware of the fact that all these skills and characteristics can be easily learned. They need to keep an open mind and be willing to try the suggested strategies and techniques.

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